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Introduction

Are African Males Men? Sketching African Masculinities

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> The stupid inertness of the puzzled negro is duller than that of an oxen; a dog would grasp your meaning in one half the time. 'Men and brothers'! They may be brothers, but they certainly are not men. (Robert Baden-Powell, cited in Hyman 1993: 278).

Of the Zulu, at the turn of the twentieth century, it was written:

> Throughout his life, the Zulu of the olden times was subjected to a remarkable system of unremitting discipline, but it was a discipline that 'Made him honest, brave and wise, respectful toward king and neighbour … He was a cunning and daring opponent, a keen logician and consummate diplomatist, not a mongrel but a man of repute, not a debased savage but an intelligent being. He was, in short, a man of right with an undeniably just and overwhelmingly strong claim to be dealt with as such', even by his conquerors and every other Whiteman living in Africa. (Stuart 1903: 13, cited in Binns 1975: 183).

The Boy Scouts' founder's view of African men and, by inference, expressions of masculinity on the African continent, seen in the first quote follows the Eurocentric and colonial tradition of regarding Africans as lacking in almost every virtue. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European traders, missionaries and colonizers who operated on the African continent left a rich store of records, telling the world that Africa and its peoples, especially its men, were morally bankrupt, inept, barbaric, backward and doomed (McFarlan 1946; Middleton and Kershaw 1972). When colonial powers in Africa sponsored ethnographic studies of African societies, it was by no means a product of a

sincere desire to understand Africa and Africans but an opportunity to collect materials to back up what they considered to be the disparity between the civilized and enlightened world on one hand and the barbaric and dark continent on the other (Hutchinson 1966; Wilson-Haffenden 1967: 95). Thus, colonial ethnography became the tool for serving colonial interests. It created unequal 'others', depicting Africa as the 'other world'. These early ethnographies often shared the perspectives of European commissioned officers who served in Colonial Africa. European societies became the standard against which Africans were judged and were found lacking (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 39).

Baden-Powell, a distinguished British colonial military officer, is not known as an anthropologist/ethnographer, but by dismissing African men as 'not men' he aptly exhibited western contempt for African manifestations of masculinity. He reached his conclusion because he looked at African masculinities from a certain lens; from all indications, a race-coated lens. To Baden-Powell, by deduction, masculinity should be measured in terms of 'intelligence' and 'action', and from his viewpoint nineteenth- and early twentieth century-African men lacked these attributes. They were not only 'stupid' – lacking in intelligence and insensible – but sluggish and lifeless (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1993: 763, 3111). Moreover, they were 'inert' – without inherent power of action or resistance (ibid. 1357). Incidentally, their stupidity and inertness were of such a magnitude to be at par with that of oxen – a castrated male animal. Even a dog was more intelligent than them. Simply put, they were not man enough!

Baden-Powell's comments imply some underlying awareness that masculinity had various shades, even in his own days. One form of it, a superior form obviously, was his European (more appropriately British) model, manifested through intelligence, quick wit, power and action. The other was his African model, identified by stupidity, dullness and inertness, not to mention a total lack of power and apparent unreliability. And yet, Baden-Powell acknowledged that they (Europeans) and them (Africans) both belonged to that universal stock of human males for he said: 'they may be brothers…' This awareness of the existence of various shades of masculinities was not applied to African men whom Baden-Powell judged, using his European lens, and fitted into an imaginary homogenized global form of deficient masculinity.

An issue that Baden-Powell did not grasp by the time he penned these sentences on African masculinity was the social construction of notions of maleness. That gender categories are socially constructed indicates the existence of varieties of masculinity within a society, across societies and across continents. In line with this, Baden-Powell also failed to understand how yardsticks for assessing manifestations of masculinity could differ from place to place and from continent to continent. One thing that must be said for these earlier yardsticks is that none was objective especially when applied across racial and geographical boundaries. To a reasonable

extent, the same can be said of most stereotypical yardsticks still employed in the contemporary period. One puzzle is: how would Baden-Powell have categorized the Hua of Papua New Guinea, who see masculine subjects as highly placed but physically powerless and weak? And among whom masculinity is lost by men as they age but gained by women through childbearing? (Anselmi and Law 1998: 157). On Baden-Powell's summation of African men, Hyman (1993: 278) observes that 'Baden-Powell's outlook fitted in perfectly with the aggressive racial attitudes of the time. Although he denied being a "regular nigger-hater"….' he nonetheless subscribed to stereotyped notions of the African man's laziness and unreliability.

In this examination of African masculinities, it will serve us to remember that considerations of masculinity (and masculinities) are society-specific. Masculinity is what any given society accepts as features associated with the male gender and expressions of maleness. Masculinity speaks of those practices and ways of being that serve to validate a masculine subject's sense of itself as a male, boy or man (Whitehead 2002: 4). Race, culture, religion and belief systems, environmental realities and historical experiences influence notions of masculinities all over the world, not least in Africa. Moreover, these notions alter within different contexts: when in reference to females as a category and as belonging to different age groups; also when applied to men of diverse ages, social classes and from different societies. These facts should humble us when tempted to project on 'others' a particular notion or form of masculinity.

To begin our investigation of African masculinities, our first question is: who are African men? Broadly speaking, Africans are persons who are indigenous to and inhabit the African continent. They include all the races and racial mixtures that are harboured and continue to be harboured in Africa along with the inhabitants of islands on the Atlantic and Indian oceans who regard themselves as Africans and are duly recognized as such by the African Union. The male segment of these societies comprises African men whose masculinities are the focus of our discussion in this volume. These men vary according to their races and geographical placement within the continent. For the purpose of this discussion, I adopt the OAU/AU simplified geographical categorization of the African continent into North, West, East, Central and Southern Africa. Put together, they incorporate sections both north and south of the Sahara.

My definition identifying who African men are undoubtedly has contenders in individuals and groups that would want to dismember Africa to deny it any historical relevance. One such individual is C. T. Binns, who in *The Warrior People* (1975) traced the origins of some Southern African groups to Egypt. He asserts that Ancient Egyptians were a superior race different from indigenous African peoples whom they met when they arrived in Egypt, then subjugated and ended up amalgamating (1975: 20). In another part of his book, he wrote that the Ancient Egyptians and African peoples 'have many things in common', indicating

'that there must have been some link between these Ancient people and the Africans of today' (1975: 34). Whatever Binns wants us to believe, the fact remains that both the Ancient Egyptians and the African peoples they 'met', 'subjugated and amalgamated' ended up in Africa; thanks, according to Binns, to the famous great cataclysmic upheavals of many millions of years ago in Gondwanaland (Matthews 1973; Binns 1975: 18). If all mankind lived together in Gondwanaland before the great cataclysmic upheavals that scattered them over the many continents and isles as we know them today, those groups of peoples and races that afterwards congregated in specific sections of the globe should be regarded and treated as 'indigenous' to those places, since Gondwanaland no longer exists. Thus, Ancient Egyptians, whether indigenous Negro stock or not, who occupied Egypt since 5500 BC were bona fide Africans. They and their descendants presently occupying Egypt are treated in this examination as Africans. The same applies to white South Africans and peoples of Arabic and Asian ancestries found in the continent who claim citizenship of specific African countries.

Are African Males Men?

There are many ways of answering this question. It can be considered biologically and culturally. Biologically, what basically distinguishes a human male from a non-male is the presence of male genitals and accessory male sexual characteristics. Granted, Africa historically has had its share of human hermaphrodites and men castrated for purposes of military and domestic responsibilities. These are human species, which though manifesting a majority of male biological features, cannot be regarded as fully male because of natural and artificial interferences with the development of their male sexual organs. For hermaphrodites, only a medical assessment can prove their degree of maleness. Nevertheless, the presence of these 'sub-male' categories, as we may call them, does not imply that Africa is lacking in genetically masculine subjects or, as Baden-Powell informed the world, that African males are not men, implying not masculine enough to be aggressive, intelligent, powerful and assertive. Secondly, there are many cultural traits identified in African societies as evidence of masculinity. These traits can be considered on the basis of accounts from different African societies in the different regions of the continent and within specific historical periods.

The first dynasty of Ancient Egypt (3100–2800 BC) was known for a high degree of civilization with the art of writing so well established that Ancient Egyptians shared with the Sumerians, a pre-Babylonian people, the invention of this art. The Egyptian and Sumerian civilizations were the first known in the world (Binns 1975: 20; Shillington 1995: 20). Such a developed society as Ancient Egypt had from 3100 until 1100 BC was the product of many centuries of well-coordinated administration. Egypt was highly structured. The majority of the population was the peasants who sustained the nation through agriculture and

supplied the labour that made Ancient Egypt great. At least, a thousand of these men built the Great Pyramid at Giza around 2400 BC. The government was run by a team of bureaucratic and well-educated civil servants (Shillington 1995: 23). Intelligence in all spheres was a marked feature of Egyptian men. Efforts to 'tame' their environment to their advantage resulted in a host of scientific inventions, including mathematics and astronomy, which have lasted to the present. Their men were also gifted in craftsmanship and developed a firmly established artistic culture. They were an active group and highly assertive as their trading exploits and their civilization indicate. Violence and martial prowess were not very pronounced in Ancient Egyptian society, and hence in their masculine subjects, for it was not until the empire was invaded during the Second Intermediate Period after the Middle Kingdom, in about 1670 BC, by foreign invaders (called Hyksos by Manetho, the Egyptian historian) from western Asia that a standing army was established and the empire 'extended by conquest' (Shillington 1995: 29). Many of the soldiers were non-Egyptians. It cannot be said with certainty what the family life of Ancient Egyptians was like and whether violence and aggressiveness were features of the private space during this period, even if not in external dealings.

Laziness was rebuked in Ancient Egyptian male youths. On a papyrus text dating to the end of the New Kingdom (1567–1085 BC), a teacher admonishes a lukewarm student as a lazy learner (Obenga 2004: 244). Intellectual life was highly esteemed above all professions. The life of a scribe was greatly preferred to those of the peasants and soldiers. The Egyptian scribe was 'a researcher, a seeker concerned first of all to guarantee the immortality of his name'; he was an intellectual with extraordinary value (ibid. 606). Scribes shaped Ancient Egyptian philosophy and for three thousand years maintained the moral, intellectual, cultural, spiritual, scientific and other values of Pharaonic society. Schools and training centres for boys existed to train achievers to become high government officials. The aim of learning was to acquire wisdom and therefore perfection. Virtue, from the development of the mind through intellectual activity, was compatible with wealth and political power. The architects who designed the pyramids and other grandiose constructions of civil and religious edifices were masters of a wide range of scientific disciplines (Shillington 1995; Obenga 2004). They must have possessed exceptional drive to have managed the vast numbers of men needed for their intricate projects.

The focus of the records on Ancient Egypt was on boys and men and their achievements, suggesting that Ancient Egypt was a male-dominated society. Little was recorded about women, who were called 'mistresses of the house'. Their domestic excellence could be gleaned from a comment in a papyrus text that described the scribe as 'like a woman cheerfully giving birth' (Obenga 2004: 246). In terms of gender relations and men's general views of women, we gain some ideas from Ptahhotep, the vizier under King Isesi of the Fifth Dynasty of the Old

Kingdom, writing about 2350 BC, who warned men to stay clear of women because of their ability to ensnare men in numerous ways and divert them 'from important goals into fleeting debauchery' (Obenga 2004: 595). Women constituted the other group, one that distracted the esteemed (masculine) category and of which the latter should be wary. In Pharaonic society, however, women were legal equals of men. They could own and use property and work as administrators or temple priestesses, but comparatively little attention was paid to them either as a group or as individuals. Few highly placed women were mentioned in the records, but by and large the references to women were for their erotic and entertainment qualities. Most likely, the number of women who were visible in the society must have been small. Male intellectuals and scribes and boy students all received attention in records on Ancient Egypt, but not so for women in similar positions. In Obenga's (2004) extensive work on Ancient Egypt, a mere six pages were devoted to issues about women and all dealt with nothing but their unresisting and dangerous sex appeal (2004: 595–600). Binns (1975) and Shillington (1995) had nothing to say about Ancient Egyptian women.

This academic silence throws much light on gender relations in Ancient Egyptian society and women's visibility within it. If women had much value besides their sexual and nurturing roles and there was more to be said about them Obenga's 671-page book, crafted from surviving hieroglyphic writings, should have had more than six pages on women and discourse on other issues than women's sexual prowess and mysteries. The argument here remains that Ancient Egypt was male-dominated. While the dominant masculinity was one that extolled intellectual prowess linked to action, it was nonetheless a masculinity predicated on domination even though women may have enjoyed a few privileges. This does not contradict my earlier claim that violence and martial prowess were not pronounced features of Ancient Egyptian dominant masculinity. Non-violence appears to have been the norm in external dealings until militarism, evidenced in the introduction of a standing army during the Second Intermediate Period (Shillington 1995: 24), became a part of Ancient Egyptian foreign policy. My argument on non-violence would not apply so simplistically to domestic affairs, if we take into consideration Ancient Egypt's dependence on forced labour.

Masculine expressions in Africa before 1880 and after, a phase that many African societies categorize as comprising pre-colonial and colonial periods, had distinctive features. These were a time of uncertainty and danger borne out of the dying yet smouldering embers of the international trade in slaves and the sudden imposition of alien rule in the form of colonialism on most African states and societies. We can look at the Zulu society of Natal in Southern Africa within these periods for an appreciation of how masculinity was constructed and what images of it can be identified. The Zulu kingdom in particular commenced its decline as an independent state in the 1880s after the defeat of its army and

capture of its king, Cetswayo, by the British. In 1887, Zululand became a British colony (Shillington 1995: 320).

Binns (1975: 183), who at the turn of the twentieth century praised Zulu males so eloquently, as we saw in the second quotation on the opening page, was not particularly fond of Sub-Saharan African groups as a whole. For instance, he dismissed Central African ritual specialists as 'a bunch of unscrupulous and avaricious rascals whose practices were so inhuman and barbaric as to make the lives of their followers nothing but a daily round of fear…'. He regarded the Negro mind as too simple to grasp the doctrine of the Trinity (1975: 37, 41). Yet he found the Zulu, among whom he lived for fifty-nine years and in whose land he worked as a colonial education officer, an amazing crop of men whom he intensely admired.

Zulu masculine subjects were praised for their 'unremitting discipline' manifested in honesty, wisdom, bravery and respect for authority. These qualities were not intrinsic but learned. In other words, Zulu society during its pre-colonial period had articulated its ideas on masculinity and set in motion informal and formal structures, the most important being the family, to transfer, through learning and practice, these qualities to every male child. The Zulu boy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not slothful. The father and the mother played complementary roles in training the male child to acquire the esteemed qualities appropriate for his gender. Binns (1975: 159) paid the following tribute to the Zulu family structure for its role in grooming boys into men:

> one cannot but stand rooted in amazement at the splendid type which was produced as a result of the 'stern family discipline' which every Zulu boy had to undergo from his earliest days to manhood.

Between the ages of 11 and 13, the society organized for boys the ceremony of the Piercing of the Ears, *Qhumbuza Izindlebe*, at which time the oldest man within an extended compound instructed initiates on appropriate daily conduct. They were taught to be totally obedient to their parents and elders, to pay careful attention to their duties, to be ready to help others and to display their masculinity, honesty, dependability and trustworthiness in all their doings. The ceremony was the boy's official step towards manhood (Binns 1975: 163–4).

An adolescent male's first nocturnal emission was a sign of his entering into manhood and indicated the right time for the most important male ritual, called the Thomba ceremony (Binns 1975: 174). The week-long event ended with an early morning bath to wash away the ways and habits of childhood and assume manhood. From then on, he would be attired as a man. 'Full' manhood, however, was attained around the age of 33, after about fifteen years of military service. It was at this point that the man could marry and undertake the responsibilities of a wife and children.

Strict discipline in childhood transformed a boy from around the age of 18 onwards into a man who was 'a cunning and daring opponent, a keen logician and consummate diplomatist', 'a man of repute' and 'an intelligent being'. Even Baden-Powell (1896), who spent some years in South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, could not help but admire the physical beauty of Zulu warriors:

> … the men themselves looked so splendid. They were as a rule fine, strong, muscular fellows with cheery, handsome faces of a rich bronze colour, and very smartly decked out with feathers and furs and cows' tails. Both the sight and the sound were intensely impressive.

Zulu men were assertive and aggressively individualistic. Their masculinity was expressed in militarism.

Zulu society was highly hierarchical and men enjoyed positions of power from the home and into the wider society. Maleness was superior; hence, men were served first and exclusively at all meals before women and children. Within the male group existed varieties of masculinities along age lines, although it should also be assumed that there was no uniform expression of masculinity within any given age category. But the preferred masculinity, by Zulu standards, combined martial prowess with honesty; high morality, as shown in the absence of pre-marital penetrative sexual interaction with a female subject even though intimate encounters were allowed; loyalty; aggression; a sense of responsibility; courage; self-reliance; athleticism; alertness; endurance; and absence of emotions (Bryant 1949; Roberts 1974).

Penetrative sexual encounters of any kind before marriage were unmasculine acts. It was inappropriate behaviour to prove one's masculinity through sexual conquest. A Zulu masculine subject must not deflower a girl: where he did, it brought public shame as well as severe repercussions to him and his family. The act was punished by the confiscation of his father's cattle, his own disinheritance, banishment or even death (Roberts 1974).

Zulu masculinity had a domestic side. The foundation was laid in childhood as boys were taught to clean the home and cook meals for their fathers. Before the age of 30, the purpose of their domestic lessons would have become obvious: they enabled the young warrior to face the rigours of military life. Masculine domesticity was for moments when the individual was alone and with no female subject nearby. It was therefore for personal survival. Much of one's youth and the early stages of adulthood were expended in military campaigns. Towards middle age, the male subject leaves the military to start a family and to begin to exercise authority over his family members. A father must prove his ability to control. Roberts (1974) and Binns (1975) described Zulu fathers as despotic rulers of their households whose orders must be implicitly obeyed. It was their responsibility to produce strong, healthy, disciplined and civilized male offspring to replace them and to serve the land.

Notions of masculinity enhance and accord privileges to one gender group, but do the opposite for the other. Used in reference to Zulu women, masculinity assumed a negative connotation as something inferior and unbecoming. For being 'extremely purposeful', 'self-willed and sharp-tongued', Nandi, the mother of Shaka, in pre-colonial Zululand was branded 'a masculine and savage woman', qualities that attracted much resentment towards her from men and women alike and also led to her estrangement from Shaka's father (Roberts 1974: 34). It was all right to be savage in pre-colonial and colonial Zululand if one was a man, but certainly not if a woman! Here is evidence that the lopsided preference that social constructions of masculinity in pre-colonial and early colonial patriarchal societies brought favoured status to males, but when applied to females brought disfavour.

The impacts of colonialism on African masculinities are seen in Shire's (1994) childhood recollections of colonial Shona society. The Shona are the original inhabitants of former Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. Shona society was gendered, with men and women having defined spaces that rarely overlapped. Both held positions, hence power relations were in a neatly single-sex hierarchical structure (Shire 1994: 149). Pre-colonial Shona masculinity was determined by an ability to 'perform', actually to manifest verbal skills. A young boy who could 'perform' by speaking convincingly and winning arguments was a man, while an older male person lacking verbal skills was a child and was often excluded in male gatherings.

Colonial experience compelled Shona men to internalize a masculinity intended to transform and place them in a subordinate position in relation to the colonial officers. British patriarchal masculinity, spread through the vehicle of colonial discourses, was projected by warfare and phallocentrism. These became part of Shona social reality during colonial occupation and led to concepts of masculinities that depended on weapon-centred notions, provoking a tendency to look to militant societies like the Zulu as models. Colonial legislation further eroded the bases of Shona masculinities, leading individual males to construct new identities that revolved around foreign ideas that promoted martial qualities. Shona traditional masculine ideals were undermined at the same time that the masculinities of the colonial class were upgraded. These 'new' masculinities became the bases for determining the real man. Shire recalls how resistance to colonial domination contributed to the emergence of multiple and changing masculinities, the dominant one manifested in male domination (Shire 1994: 150).

Colonial wage labour in particular had its own impact on the confused masculinities of Shona youth. As young Shona men left the rural (African) areas for the urban (European) areas in search of employment, they disengaged from their elders and the influence they exerted, and imbibed new masculine images and traits that predominated in the urban areas, features of which differed from what existed in the rural areas. Rural–urban migration, which commenced in

1931 after the division of the colony into African areas and European areas (Weinrich 1971: 4), undermined Shona masculine values. Being colonial subjects, Shona men lacked autonomy over the type of work they did. Thus, some had very limited options and worked in such capacities as domestics to colonial officers, a feminine task they would not perform in the rural areas (Shire 1994: 152) because of the predominance of indigenous practices. Meanwhile, the women left behind in the villages became more assertive through keeping the home front and doing things that men would have done and, gradually, women's deference to male authority diminished. In the long run, male control in the home lost its potency just as it did in the wider society where the colonial administrators took over the public political space and initiated a political structure intended, according to official colonial report, to 'break indigenous methods of control' and 'to make Africans directly dependent on European administrators' (Weinrich 1971: 11). The dwindling masculine control in the family apparently triggered gender clashes in attempts to re-establish it. In the long run, a medley of masculinities, fashioned from many conflicting models, occurred among urban Shona men and submerged their original masculinities.

Africa is not completely patriarchal and all lineages are not patrilineages. Patrilineal systems differ in detail but with a good deal in common all over the world. Of matrilineal groups, even within Africa, there are wide differences. The basic rule is that descent and inheritance claims are transmitted through women (Mair 1974: 67). Africa has no definitive evidence of a fully matriarchal society outside what exists in myths like the popular Kikuyu legend, which told of a time 'when women … ruled the country for many generations … [until] deposed from power by men …' (Kenyatta 1942: 7). However, Africa has significant areas that are matrilineal, particularly in Central and East Africa, with other matrilineal groups in North Africa (in Algeria) and West Africa (in Ghana and Nigeria).

In Africa's twentieth-century matrilineal societies, almost all important offices were held by men but because women in such groups determined the group affiliation of their children and were of great formal significance in establishing a man's rights (he claimed political office through his mother), women commonly attained a freedom of action and a degree of public significance that was difficult for them to acquire in patrilineal kin groups (Kenyatta 1942; Mair 1974; Roberts 1976; *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2003: 804). Women's enhanced social status as the determinant of the group affiliation of their male relations had implications for masculine expression in Africa's matrilineal societies, including Muslim matrilineal communities like the Tuareg (singular Targui).

Between 1948 and 1968, the Tuareg nomads of Algeria lived in tents and mobile camps in the desert. They had no villages or towns but their principal centre was Tamanrasset. Male Tuareg have intrigued observers for their supposedly misleading 'feminine' exterior. They painted their eyes and were veiled instead

of female Tuareg, quite unlike other Muslim groups where women were veiled. The culture of hiding the male face began at puberty and continued till death, with very few laws of exemption. Thus, whether eating or drinking, riding or sleeping, alone or accompanied, the face was covered with the exception of the eyes. Where at all it should be revealed, just part of the nose was shown (Keenan 1977: 128).

Wearing a veil at puberty for the first time called for family celebration to mark the adolescent's initiation into adulthood. The veil was an expression of Tuareg masculinity and group identity. It seems to hold more secrets of the Tuareg society's notions and expressions of masculinity than other symbols and behavioural traits. Without doubt, veiling by male Tuareg had no association with any form of gender inferiority nor was it used to show allegiance to women by whom power is passed to men. The veil obviously helped to conceal emotions and had the effect of lending anonymity to male Tuareg. While outside the group, the veil projects an aloofness and inherent superiority over other people (Keenan 1977: 137), its use would suggest a subtle and subdued masculinity within the group where little aggressiveness was shown. But, outside the group, it did not prevent manifestations of generally recognized masculine qualities. For example, prior to the colonization of Algeria in 1948, a colonization that for many years had little impact on desert-Tuareg nomads, male Tuareg were famed as 'head-strong warriors, camel raiders and slave traders' (Gunther 1955: 133). From these words we can extrapolate the following masculine traits: determination, aggressiveness, domination, fearlessness, martial prowess and violence.

The matrilineal Tuareg were no less masculine than their patrilineal Zulu counterparts. But, unlike the Zulu, they showed some degree of deference to women. They would not smoke, eat or receive money in front of women for reasons not quite clearly stated other than it being inconsistent with their masculine identity to do such things before women. Male Tuareg were public figures who dominated communal politics although deriving their power to control from their female relatives (Keenan 1977: 134–5). While, unlike a good many other matrilineal societies such as the Ashanti of Ghana, women were sidelined from the power source because of menstrual taboos forbidding contact with sacred objects, the Tuareg recall a famous queen who once ruled a sub-group of them. But there was not more than this one reference to such an occurrence. Tuareg women owned slaves and livestock in their own right and were prominent in social life, leading Murdock to conclude that Algerian Tuareg society was a matriarchy (Murdock 1959: 408; Keenan 1977: 107). Yet, power was structured among male Tuareg and along class lines. Male nobles controlled the vassals, male and female, and other members of the group.

Tuareg sexuality was for the most part heterosexual in its expression. (They were also monogamous, quite unlike Muslim societies of their day.) Their sexuality was not ascribed by their religious culture. Men married late as a rule and there

was no regulation for abstinence when unmarried. Also, during the time under investigation, Tuareg girls were among the few women in the Islamic world free to express their sexuality before marriage. Keenan (1977: 107) and Gunther (1955: 134) observed that females were allowed to flirt and did so unreservedly. However, female nobles enjoyed greater immunity from sexual exploitation than vassals. Tuareg males had physical appeal. They were portrayed to be majestic, tall, with a splendid bearing and proud (Gunther 1955). Make-up, especially the use of eye paint to ring the lids, was part of Tuareg masculine dressing just as a tattoo was an indispensable feature for women. The masculinity of the noble class was shown in a relative life of leisure. Nobles did not work, work being solely the responsibility of vassals. Success was not determined by wealth, for the Tuareg were not wealthy by modern standards and their frugal lifestyle is an indication of the absence of materialistic preoccupation. Mair (1974: 67) observes that one rarely finds matrilineal groups where there is any kind of significant property to inherit. Although it is dangerous to apply this across the board, the story of the Tuareg and other colonial matrilineal societies seem to lend some credence to it. Tuareg masculinity does not fit perfectly into the popular mould. It combines contradictory features and, with respect to its expressions towards women, lacks a rigid hegemonic quality, perhaps out of deference to the women for their privilege in determining men's social and political positions.

Tuareg male vassals constitute another and different masculine category within the larger Tuareg society. Theirs was a reticent and dependent masculinity. Isolated 'naturally' as it were, from political and social privileges, they were men but without the cultural backing to manifest most conventional Tuareg masculine qualities. They were servants to the noble class of whom control over vassals was of utmost importance (Keenan 1977: 32). Even the vassal headman had little or no judicial, political or military authority over his descent group. He was merely a representative of a noble king for whom he collected taxes and tributes. In spite of the reticent nature of Tuareg male vassals' masculinity, they nonetheless exercised some control over their women at the family level. In relation to Tuareg female vassals, male vassals had political advantage, but in relation to nobles and to other vassals as a group, they exhibited a reticent masculinity.

The repressed and dependent masculinity of the Tuareg male vassals was somewhat replicated by Lele males found on the edge of the equatorial rain forest in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, before 1970. However, there were very clear differences in male subjects' expressions of masculinity between these two matrilineal groups. Young Lele men prior to marriage served as servants to their elders, both their father's and mother's brothers; and remained dependent on their mothers for their wellbeing. Lacking in personal independence and assertiveness, owing to a gender structure that disfavoured them, life was one of discomfort and hardship for these men (Mair 1974: 70).

When they eventually married, it was first a joint affair in which an age group of ten to twelve men were jointly committed to one wife. In other words, polyandry was the norm. In such arrangements, the woman was the privileged personality in the relationship. She controlled her group of husbands and regulated sexual interaction among them to her advantage. Meanwhile, she did no domestic or any other type of work for her husbands who, on the other hand, were obliged to serve her parents as sons-in-law, to please her in order to remain married to her and to give her gifts that went to her marriage payment. Moreover, men left their communities at marriage to join their wives' communities. Children born by a woman when married by a group of husbands belonged to none of the prospective fathers but to the wife's village. Control by a father over the children and their mother was almost non-existent at this time. Lele men were constrained to prove their masculinity through service to parents-in-law and the wife's community. Virility was shown by sexual conquests of other men's wives.

When a woman was ready to settle down to raise a family, she selected four or five of her husbands to live with; this number eventually diminishes to three. It was for this small crop of husbands that she performed traditional wifely duties (Mair 1974: 72). From this time onwards, husband domination began. Prior to this time, authority over a female subject resided with whoever had the right to give her in marriage, namely the father. But, besides that, he had little control over the daughter who belonged not to his own lineage but to her mother's. Lele community was organized with the oldest man at the helm but there was a total lack of coercive power at the communal level. The system of polyandry was legislated against by the colonial authority and it eventually withered away. Moreover, with the growing popularity of Christian ethics, most Lele men disengaged from traditional matrilineal practices, favouring Christian patriarchal tendencies.

There was more than one way of being a man and more than one type of masculinity. In all the societies discussed, men in patriarchal settings were irrefutably the favoured class: an esteemed group that grew from childhood to manhood culturally imbued with notions that made them believe they were superior and had multiple privileges, including inherent rights to dominate. Where matrilinealism diffused such masculine confidence, colonialism, which was uniformly patriarchal in its verbal and non-verbal expressions and social exportations in the continent, undermined non-patriarchal hegemonic masculinities. Other factors, however, strengthened the colonial impact. In answer to the question: 'Are African males men?' we have enough data from the foregoing to arrive at our individual conclusions. This collection has a goal of celebrating Africa's diversities as well as its unity through critical examinations of various shades and ramifications of Africa's masculinities and what these portend for the peoples of Africa and gender relations on the continent.

Contemporary Masculinities

So much has changed regarding notions and expressions of masculinities in Africa since ancient times. Many aspects of modern masculinities were fashioned during the colonial period and after. Different aspects of contemporary African masculinities are addressed by each of the contributors to this volume. Although it has been the preoccupation of scholars, male and female alike, to study men; such an academic exercise requires a new tilt. What is needed, argues Ratele in this volume, is a critical study of masculine subjects. This new dimension to African gender scholarship will interrogate issues about men and dominance much more directly than mainstream gender studies approached from a feminist perspective have done. Masculinities scholars are engaged in gender scholarship. They must be familiar with feminist theories in, and place of an implicit focus, should accord specific attention to men and masculinities, showing recognition of men and masculinities as social and cultural productions that differ within contexts, nations and continents. In this lies the departure from non-critical studies of men often conducted by non-gender-conscious men who see their works as a response to the establishment of feminist thought and women's liberation, with the aim of giving men something similar to what women's studies have given women. Un-critical studies of men globally are more popular and tend to restore traditional values of womanhood; hence, Ratele's call for critical studies of men, especially in Africa where masculinities studies are at an early stage.

Kabaji's discussion of the bullfighting ceremony among the Luhyia, Kenya, provides an appreciation of how masculine images are portrayed in mundane activities, including games. The language of the game embeds masculine desires and aspirations of the Luhyia. It is used to prove the degree to which an adult male has achieved the masculine ideal. The phallus is celebrated in this game as an estimable symbol of masculinity. Male fascination with sex and the predilection to violence were themes projected through the medium of the bullfight. Sexual identity and expression are integral in understanding masculinity in this society. Still on the theme of male sexuality, Onyango concentrates on rape as a weapon of masculine domination also in Kenya. Griffin (in Herman 1984: 20) equates rape to a kind of terrorism that severely limits the freedom of women, making them dependent on men. In Kenya, as Onyango demonstrates, rape against women is rooted in societal ideological and power structures related to hegemonic masculinities and which supports men's sexual aggression against women. Ideologies of masculine sexuality appear so pervading that all categories of men, including law enforcement officers, fathers, brothers, teachers, top government officials and so on, are implicated in rape crimes. Here, too, as in Kabaji's study, language is used to construct images of male sexual domination as one form of overall domination of women. Onyango uses newspaper reports to illustrate how language serves as a tool for perpetuating rape violence, while embedding

practices of domination and discrimination simultaneously. Domination is a masculine quality that transcends social boundaries and which is institutionalized in patriarchal societies.

Drawing from various authorities, Dialmy outlines some observations on Moroccan male subjects' masculinities, which in some ways and given the dominant Islamic religious culture, is symptomatic of much of North Africa. He discusses the goals of religious and sexual socialization in Morocco, which include: the avoidance of every manifestation of femininity; constructing an image of the male as powerful to prepare him for the public space; and esteeming phallic virility, aggressiveness and competitiveness. Religious socialization in particular contributes to a construction of gender relations where masculinity is socially privileged and where heterosexuality is projected. Homosexuality has long been a common practice in North Africa (Gunther 1955; Mernissi 1996) and is predicated in religious socialization. The absence of social contacts and close and intimate interactions with young girls of one's milieu prior to marriage predisposes male youths to homosexual practices, if they do not seek sexual outlet with prostitutes. Dialmy provides insight into the effect of legal changes in favour of female public visibility on Moroccan masculinities. But, in contrast to these developments, religious fundamentalism seeks to maintain traditional masculine privileges in the name of the sacred.

Masculine ideologies are learned by male human beings beginning from childhood. This is the argument of Koudolo, who identifies the family, mass and audio-visual media, religion, education and interpersonal interactions as among the factors that contribute to the development of any particular brand of masculinity in a Togolese male subject. Koudolo discusses how these factors oscillate between tradition and modernity to produce masculine stereotypes, sometimes combining indigenous and foreign models. Examining the socialization process for Togolese male subjects, she exposes the dynamics in the formation of culturally appropriate masculine qualities.

Kelly's study of white South African youths shows how similar their ideas on their masculinities are to those of black South Africans, even while these are expressed differently. Like Ratele, Kelly considers it very necessary that African scholars study white masculinities along with black masculinities because of the many versions that are embedded in the former. Importantly, white masculinities entrenched white male privileges by projecting the exclusion of African masculinities. Colonialism, she notes, played a crucial role in entrenching white male privilege in South Africa. But colonialism was not the sole factor. Along with it went racism, by which such hereditary characteristics as skin colour became the distinguishing factor for assessing and categorizing 'superior' as well as 'inferior' masculinities. Consequently, the dismantling of Apartheid has, to some extent, removed boundaries separating white and black segments of the society and

subsequently gave rise to white male population's reconsiderations of their privileges, but the new versions of white masculinities that seem to emerge in post-apartheid South Africa somehow continue to project the supremacy of white masculinities over black masculinities. Kelly's study informs us how historical experiences determine social experiences. In this case, the ideologies backing certain types of masculinities were punctured because of their irrelevance in a specific era.

Political masculinity that projects public patriarchy is the thrust of Mouiche's paper. Mouiche tells us how, and on what bases, the African state is masculine and incorporates gender disequilibrium. The evolution of the African political milieu and associated rights were fundamentally influenced by colonialism, which left it considerably masculinized and appropriated as a male sphere. Mouiche demonstrates how colonial power, which was highly repressive, was responsible for entrenching post-colonial political masculinity. Under colonialism, the administrative, military and other personnel were male. This meant that the colonial authorities banned perspectives that were open to women in certain regions to escape masculine domination. Colonial patriarchal ideologies in association with indigenous patriarchal ideologies reinforced subordination, exploitation and oppression of women. In post-colonial Africa, political masculinity consists of a quantitative dimension, comprising an inflated male domination at the highest state positions, and a qualitative dimension, referring to the nature of political power manifested, namely, violence, authoritarianism, war, personalization of power and so on. Often, politics is confused with war, and the war imperative makes it more of a male institution. Mouiche's study further shows how women, through apathy and other self-defeating factors, contributed to the institutionalization of post-independence political sexism in Africa.

Lastly, Chiuri's paper exposes masculine irresponsibility in rural Kenya, which contributes to persistent poverty. Chiuri's thesis – that rural Kenyan males' lack of accountability, influenced by a hegemonic masculine ideology, is responsible for gross poverty in rural Kenya – can be applied to many countries in Africa with a predominantly agricultural economy. Africa is the one continent where, despite all attempts, there is as yet no improvement in the level of poverty crippling individual countries. From Chiuri, we understand that one factor for Africa's deep-seated poverty is masculine inefficiency: men's failure to efficiently use their time and invest their labour along with women. Using gender daily calendars from participatory rural appraisals and other tools, Chiuri argues that if rural men would invest eight hours daily on productive farm labour, one of the forms of poorly paid unskilled work, Africa would break out of the scourge of poverty. In effect, Africa can generate wealth in place of poverty when individual countries emphasize masculine productivity, and not depend solely on women who historically are acknowledged as supplying the bulk of the labour in the subsistence sector.

These papers individually contribute to the construction of masculinities while demonstrating commonalities that show their interconnectedness. Embedded in the discussions are issues requiring further and broader-based investigations if we are to understand, as much as possible, African men and their masculinities along with the impact of the latter on the continent.

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2

Studying Men in Africa Critically

Kopano Ratele

How vital is it to study men? My purpose in this study is to show that it is as essential to investigate a Mopedi or Sudanese man (as instances) as one of the Bapedi ethnic group or the Sudanese nation as it is to look at them as *men* of the Bapedi and *men* in Sudan. It is equally important to study a man as a part of the group called men as is to study them as ethnic or national subjects.

Then again, perhaps one ought to pose the question directly: whether there is anything of consequence that gets lost from studying men *indirectly*. I mean by this, whether there is something of significance we miss if we adopt a lens that, for instance, places *women* at the centre in studying men, as feminist studies have done for long. I shall maintain that we do indeed tend to mis-appreciate some of the true forms and functions of psychic structures, the world of labour and capital, cultural forms and political landscape if we do not examine closely the deployment of masculinity in the structuring of psyches, in employment and money-making, in culture and politics.

It is important to stress that what I suspect is an ever-present possibility of mis-appreciation, not malevolence; I see the project of studying men as related to and supportive of radical gender transformation, at least in Africa. For anyone concerned with injustice around the world, a study of men cannot be underlined by the project of subverting male power, of reworking hegemonic masculinities and gendered superiority. In such a world as we have, authenticating manhood or finding the lost key to being a true male cannot be the driving purpose of our investigation of masculinity. Even as I seek to show the gain of investigating men as subject to gender power as much as they are of ethnic or linguistic power, race or national ideology, culture or class, I am at once going to allow myself to wonder whether it is best to do so by putting our energies towards